

LOUISIANA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

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Department of Agriculture and Forestry News Update

LDAF Commissioner Begins Statewide Listening Tour

BATON ROUGE - Louisiana Commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry Mike Strain, D.V.M., met with more than 400 agricultural producers, landowners and agricultural lenders on Monday as part of a statewide listening tour on the concerns of the agribusiness community in the aftermath of Hurricane Gustav.

Strain spoke to about 300 producers in Oak Grove at the Thomas Lingo Community Center, and later to a group of 100 at Goldman Equipment in Mer Rouge.

For the past six days, Strain has been listening to the concerns of agribusiness interests relating to crop damages and flooded crops caused by Hurricane Gustav.

Strain advised all farmers to register with FEMA at 1-800-621-3362 (FEMA) and sign up for crop insurance and the Non-insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) coverage for non-insurable crops if they had not already done so.

"There are a lot of questions being posed right now concerning disaster assistance as a result of damages from Gustav and the 20 inches of rain the storm deposited in parts of Louisiana," Strain said. "The amount of government assistance and the timeline for relief is uncertain but producers must sign up for crop insurance at their local Farm Service Agency office if they are to become eligible to receive any sort of assistance."

Strain said the U.S. Congress did not pass the 2008 Farm Bill until after the crop insurance sign up period had expired, but allowances were made for the late passage to protect farmers.

"The farm bill makes provisions for producers who did not get 2008 crop insurance or NAP coverage to 'buy in' to the disaster assistance program," Strain said.

The buy-in fee is due no later than September 16, 2008.

"Those who miss this opportunity will not be eligible for disaster assistance," Strain said.

The cost for the buy-in is \$100 per crop ! not to exceed \$300 per producer, per parish or \$900 per multiple parish.

Strain also urged everyone to document their damages with photos and/or video and to keep all receipts for expenses caused by Hurricane Gustav.

"Our producers can't wait until the fall of 2009 before receiving some sort of financial assistance from the government," Strain said. "The Department of Agriculture and Forestry will continue to work closely with the Governor, our congressional delegation, and FEMA in order to expedite some sort of assistance for hard-hit producers, grain elevators and processors."

Strain said producers were anticipating record crops prior to the storm.

"Yields were looking good as our farmers invested time, money, and energy into preparing for the harvest," Strain said. "Then Gustav hit and they'll be hard-pressed to finish the crop."

Strain observed flooded crop fields from the air and then toured the fields at ground level with Senator Mike Walsworth of West Monroe, Representatives Sam Little of Bastrop, and Charles "Bubba" Chaney of Rayville.

"Right now there are a lot of questions," Strain said. "We're working hard at getting the answers."

Strain will continue to tour the state and visit with farmers, producers and other agribusiness concerns this week and is scheduled to appear at the Highway 15 Community Center in Ferriday and at Goldman Equipment in Lake Providence on Tuesday.

Strain is tentatively scheduled to visit Evangeline and Pointe Coupee parishes on Wednesday, but that trip may be delayed by concerns about Hurricane Ike.

For more information, visit www.ldaf.state.la.us.

For the latest information on the recovery from Hurricane Gustav, visit emergency.louisiana.gov or call the state's emergency hotline at 1-866-288-2484 to listen to a recorded message with the most up-to-date information.

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